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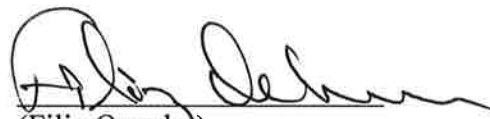
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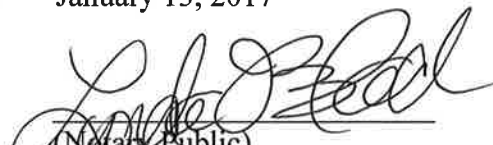
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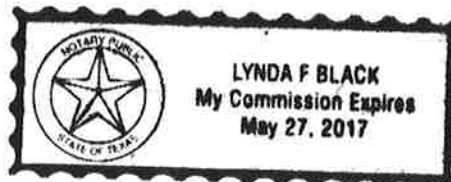
was published in The Dallas Morning News

December 12, 2016

  
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DALLAS COUNTY SCHOOLS

# Richardson voices bus concerns

District willing to give time for fixes but hints it could explore options

By SCOTT FRIEDMAN  
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Richardson ISD has joined a growing list of local school districts expressing concerns about late Dallas County Schools buses making students tardy for class. Richardson is one of 12 districts contracting with Dallas County Schools, which has been under fire recently for safety lapses and chronically late service.

Officials with the district

told KXAS-TV (NBC5) they are willing to give the agency a couple of months to the fix issues.

"Our job is to educate students, and we can't educate them if they are not in their classrooms," said Sandra Hayes, assistant superintendent with the district.

Hayes said her staff often discusses concerns with DCS. "We monitor daily the number of routes they're down on drivers, and then we monitor how quickly they can reassign routes and get our kids where they need to be," she said.

The Dallas, Coppell, Irving and Lancaster school

districts also have complained about tardy DCS buses this school year. Dallas and Lancaster have announced plans to consider a new bus provider, and Hayes said Richardson will weigh its options as well if DCS' performance doesn't improve.

"I don't have a deadline, a hard deadline, but I'd like to see it quickly," Hayes said.

DCS has said it's struggling with a driver shortage and has 154 openings across all 12 districts. The agency is actively recruiting at area job fairs.

The agency said its on-time rate has improved to 90

percent systemwide in recent months. However, that statistic comes from an electronic tracking system installed on only about half of the fleet.

DCS officials added they are continuing to meet with districts to work through any service concerns. In 2012, there were similar complaints from then-Dallas ISD superintendent Mike Miles about late buses and a shortage of drivers. DCS promised then to make changes to ensure the agency would not face a similar situation again.

Twitter: @ScottNBC5

# DCS says it's getting tough on complaints

Continued from Page 1B

a prepared statement.

Through an open records request, KXAS-TV (NBC5) obtained records showing that motorists had called in over 4,000 complaints in less than two years.

One bus driver received 32 complaints, mostly for reckless driving and speeding — and DCS confirmed that driver is still behind the wheel.

But the agency said he's one of more than a dozen drivers who will now be subject to the weekly random checks.

Safety experts said it's important for management to deal with complaints right away.

"If there's dangerous driving behavior out there, if there's bad habits that are out there, they need to be addressed. And it needs to be done quickly," National Safety Council CEO Deborah Hersman said. "Sometimes it might mean discipline in very severe situations."

In all, 26 DCS drivers received 10 or more complaints in less than two years. Four of them were fired after further investigation. Two others have retired, while others have been ordered to undergo retraining.

DCS noted that some complaint calls it receives are unreliable.

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# Study finds pre-K programs pay off

Continued from Page 1B

gram compared with those who did not attend.

Kids in the program had educational playtime and individual attention from teachers. They also got medical checkups while moms learned how to boost learning within the home.

The researchers found lasting benefits for the kids included higher IQ levels, reduced health risks, and better education and job outcomes.

And boys benefited the most, said Heckman, who added that growing research shows they often struggle more than girls do, particularly in the early years. Boys are also more vulnerable to the harmful effects of bad preschool — those that amount to just "warehousing" children — which includes increased negative social-emotional behaviors, Heckman said.

"Quality is probably more of an issue for boys than girls," he said.

Most areas can't afford programs that work with children from birth. But Heckman said more cities, states and even some countries are looking for ways to copy the key aspects of the North Carolina program studied. But hiring enough qualified teachers and providing the training needed is costly, critics say.

"As an economist, I always find it very odd that people only focus on the costs of a program rather than the benefits," Heckman said. In fact, his recent findings show significantly greater annual returns on investments than from a similar study he did on another preschool program that began working with kids at ages 3 and 4.

Two things mattered most, Heckman said: teachers who sincerely cared about kids and activities that helped moms bond with their children.

These are qualities that many Texas school districts want to bring into their pre-K programs using new state grants.

But it's not that simple. Districts hesitate because the state may not renew that money and already strained local budgets can't take on the costs. The \$16 million in pre-K grants is only guaranteed for two years.

A report by the local nonprofit Commit found that Dallas County school districts sig-



Photos by Jeffrey McWhorter/Special Contributor

Preschool teacher Dana Wilson gave a lesson about food and nutrition on Friday at Wilmer Early Childhood Center.

nificantly scaled back pre-K plans and tried to avoid long-term investments.

Dallas ISD, for example, is using part of its \$6.5 million in grant funding to start a pilot program at select schools for boosting parent engagement. The goal is to create centers for parents to learn how to help their children academically as well as building support groups with other parents, said Derek Little, assistant superintendent of early childhood education at ISD. Some pre-K teachers will also visit students' homes to get to know families.

"Building these relationships really reveals to the teachers who that individual child is," Little said. "They develop this strong sense of empathy so that every time that child walks through the door, they have a better idea of what that kid's hopes and dreams are."

But if lawmakers don't re-

new the pre-K funding, such outreach could stop, Little said.

As the legislative session prepares to kick off next month, early childhood education advocates are hopeful that lawmakers will find a way to improve pre-K, particularly by making such funding more permanent so that districts can make more long-term investments.

But any move to do so will face significant push-back. During a committee hearing this summer, some conservative state senators were already questioning whether pre-K investment is worth the cost. They pointed to a Vanderbilt University study that suggests the benefits of pre-K fade by the third grade.

But in Tennessee, where that study was done, instead of backing away from pre-K, lawmakers doubled down on early childhood education by pass-

ing legislation to improve quality.

Twitter: @EvaMarieAyala

## NOTICE OF INTENT TO APPLY FOR PASSAGE OF A LOCAL BILL FOR DALLAS AND KAUFMAN COUNTIES

This is to give notice of intent to introduce in the 85th Legislature, Regular Session, a bill to provide a method for dissolution of the Bois D'Arc Island Levee Improvement District of Dallas and Kaufman Counties if a majority of the board is not elected. The District was codified during the 78th Texas Legislature by HB3508 which established the district for constructing / maintaining levees to provide for the proper drainage for land inside the district. The district has not had an elected board member for several years despite efforts to encourage citizen participation. Dallas and Kaufman Counties seek an amendment to Chapter 7801 of the Special District Local Laws code to provide for a method of dissolution should a board not be elected in 2018.

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